

ROCK 'N' JAZZ CLINIC

by Bob Saylowski, Jr.

The Rhythms Of Frank Zappa

Frank Zappa frequently composes using odd rhythmic groupings—quintuplets, septuplets, etc.—played over standard meters. The best way to approach these polyrhythms is to *subdivide* each grouping into 2's and 3's, in order to keep track of the number of notes being played. When playing these groupings, each unit should be played as evenly as possible, making sure each note and the space between notes have equal lengths.

Keep in mind that, within a consistent tempo, septuplets are played faster than quintuplets, quintuplets faster than triplets etc., so that the notes can fit evenly into the given beat. While practicing these, it is recommended that you use a metronome to help you keep a steady pulse. When accents are marked, your best bet is to subdivide at the accent, causing a stronger beat on the 1 count of the subdivision.

The following are examples of the rhythmic patterns from several Zappa compositions. The first two are from "Be-Bop Tango" (*Roxy And Elsewhere*, Discreet 2DS 2202 1973, Munchkin Music).

6 7 7 6
1 2 3 | 1 2 3 | 1 2 3 | 1 2 3 | 1 2 3 | 1 2 3 |
5 5 7 5 7
1 2 1 2 3 | 1 2 1 2 3 | 1 2 1 2 3 | 1 2 1 2 3 | 1 2 1 2 3 | 1 2 1 2 3 |

The next example is from "Manx Needs Woman" (*Zappa In New York*, Discreet 2D 2290 1977, Munchkin Music). Note that the pattern begins on the fourth beat of the first measure.

> 1 2 1 2 3 | 1 2 3 | > 1 2 1 | 1 2 1 2 3 |
1 2 3 | 1 2 3 | 1 2 3 | 1 2 3 | 1 2 3 | 1 2 3 |
1 2 3 | 1 2 3 | 1 2 3 | 1 2 3 | 1 2 3 | 1 2 3 |

The following pattern comes from "Does This Sort Of Life Look Interesting To You?" (200 Motels, United Artists UAS 9956 1971 Munchkin Music.)

1 2 3 | 1 2 3 | 1 2 3 | 1 2 3 | 1 2 3 | 1 2 3 |
1 2 3 | 1 2 3 | 1 2 3 | 1 2 3 | 1 2 3 | 1 2 3 |

Zappa also writes melodic pieces for the drumset. Here is the rhythmic pattern for the first eight bars of "The Black Page" (*Zappa In New York* 1977, Munchkin Music):

♩ = 58 - 66
3 3 5



Here is the same pattern, written melodically for the drumset. Remember, division of polyrhythmic groupings should be in 2's and 3's.

Bongos
Cowbell
TT SD FT BD

$\frac{4}{4}$

All selections composed by Frank Zappa. A catalog of Scores and Parts to Frank Zappa's music is available from Barfko-Swill, P.O. Box 5418, North Hollywood, CA 91616-5418. (818) PUMPKIN.

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